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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 331

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Doug Walker, President of the Kanza Rail Trails Conservancy Inc.. We are a 501 (c)(3) not for profit Kansas Corporation which relies on donations from individuals, corporations and foundations. We are a totally volunteer organization with no paid staff. We hold title to the 117-mile Flint Hills Trail from Osawatomie to Herington. This trail runs through five counties and at least 10 communities. We have been in the process of developing this trail since 2001.

The Flint Hills Nature Trail is a Kansas treasure. This rail banked corridor goes through eastern woodlands in Miami county, farm land in Franklin & Osage counties, and the Flint Hills in Morris and Dickinson counties. It is open to hikers, equestrians and bicyclists.

We are here today to support adding the Flint Hills trail to the State Park system.

This trail intersects the 54-mile Prairie Spirit Trail State Park in Ottawa and Landon Nature Trail near Pomona creating a network of trails over 215 miles long which eventually could go from Topeka to Humboldt and from Osawatomie to Herington.

Trail usage is up across the country. People want more recreational trails. Already on the Flint Hills trail we have had marathons, ultra marathons, local bike rides and runs. This past October we hosted the Rush the Rails inaugural bike ride and run. This consisted of 291 registered riders and runners starting either in Osawatomie, for a 96-mile event, Pomona State Park or in Admire for a 25 mile event. This event is only expected to grow

Collaborating with the state in its ability to access federal grants, substantial upgrades have been made over the past four years. Those newly developed sections are comparable to or exceed anything currently existing on the KATY trail in Missouri. This trail provides recreational opportunities to the local residents of the communities it passes through and brings user dollars from all over the state and country. With a completed trail the economic upside for these communities is enormous.

The State is better able to promote, patrol and maintain the trail than we are. While we are donating the trail to the State, we look forward to continuing our partnership with the State by helping maintain and promote the trail.

We ask that you support this bill making the Flint Hills Trail a state park.

Doug Walker
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